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The Presidio of San Francisco

A Study in Inter-Agency Cooperation

The adobe is bad in itself because of the dampness it crumbles. The store houses are built of mud without any support [plaster] and therefore exposed to rain...[the guard-house's] walls are crumbling. The sergeant's house is of stone without support and is falling down. All the walls of the church are crumbling...The wind blows in such a way...that they are like hurricanes which make notable harm in the roofs and every year one must attend to them with unendless work.

—Comandante Hermegildo Sal, 1792

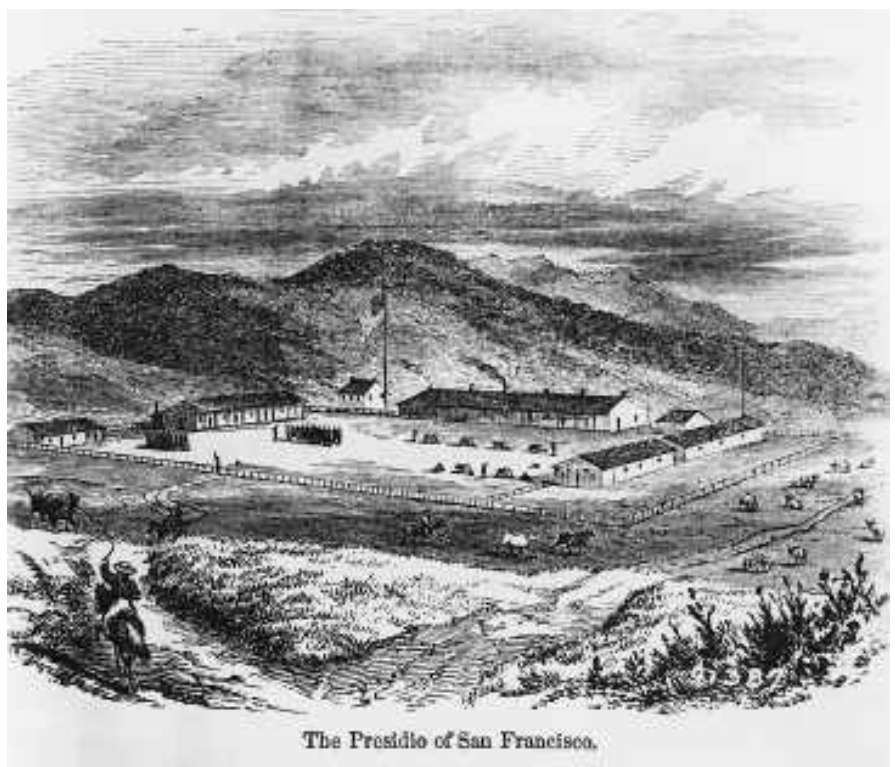
It is difficult to imagine that this lament, written by the Spanish Commander of the Presidio de San Francisco some 16 years after its founding, describes the idyllic refuge which today crowns one of America's most beautiful cities. Yet what is now a tranquil green space guarding the Golden Gate was once a harsh and forbidding place. This barren, windswept spot was beset by torrential rains and earthquakes, presenting a forbidding environment to those who endeavored to live there.

Today, the Presidio of San Francisco's rich tapestry of cultural and natural resources reflects a nearly continuous military presence of more than 200 years. The Spanish explorer Lt. Col. Juan Bautista de Anza established the outpost in 1776, the third such garrison in California. Mexico occupied the Presidio after declaring independence from Spain in

1822, and the U.S. Army took possession of the Presidio in 1848 as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This beautiful post was designated by the Secretary of the Interior in 1962 as a National Historic Landmark, and in 1972 the Presidio was included within the boundaries of the newly created Golden Gate National Recreation Area although it continued its mission as an Army garrison.

The Presidio offered an unsurpassed opportunity as well as a tremendous challenge to interpret and safeguard an important part of our nation's heritage. Recognizing the potential for encountering material culture representing 200 years of military occupation and several millennia of Native American habitation, the Sixth U.S. Army, Forces Command, worked closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District, and the U.S. Army Environmental Center. Since 1989, when Congress identified the Presidio for closure under the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1988, the Army, Corps, and National Park Service have coordinated their

The U.S. Army incorporated the remaining adobes of the Presidio of San Francisco into their early Army post in this 1855 illustration from "The Annals of San Francisco." Photo courtesy the Golden Gate National Recreation Area—Presidio of San Francisco Museum.



The Presidio of San Francisco.

Tents were pitched to house troops supporting the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurrection. The brick barracks on the left were constructed in the 1890s. Photo courtesy the Golden Gate National Recreation Area—Presidio of San Francisco Museum.



efforts to ensure the continued protection of this landmark property.

Cultural resources studies had already taken place at the Presidio to document its significance for nomination as a National Historic Landmark. This nomination has since been revised and expanded by the National Park Service. In 1985 a Historic American Buildings Survey report of the Presidio was completed, followed by an adaptive re-use study and the production of historic building maintenance manuals. Subsequently, as part of the closure process, the Army undertook archeological and other cultural resources investigations at the Presidio as it began to repair installation infrastructure and remove hazardous materials prior to transfer of the property to the National Park Service.

In 1993 the Army executed a Programmatic Agreement which detailed its responsibilities for considering the effects of its actions on cultural resources at the Presidio. In June 1993, removal of a small underground storage tank behind Officers' Quarters 12 revealed a concentration of large serpentine stones, clay roof tile fragments, and Majolica ceramic sherds. Excavation of the exposed archeological feature showed the findings to be typical of a Spanish colonial wall-foundation.

The determination that the wall was located outside the predicted footprint prompted a reexamination of the historical development of the Presidio. The discovered wall-foundation was significantly north and east of the northeast corner as established by Comandante Sal's 1792 plan. It was speculated that the foundation represented a casemate or other outbuilding. Further excavations at Officers' Quarters 12 were intended to provide the dimensions of the casemate, but actually revealed two parallel walls running north-south (the interior and exterior of the eastern portion of the quadrangle) and two interior walls running east-west.

Additional investigations to the north and south confirmed that the Spanish Presidio structure is larger than previously thought, emphasizing the importance of archeological studies in improving our understanding of the documented past. Instead of a small outbuilding as depicted in Comandante Sal's 1792 plan, archeologists had discovered the foundations of the eastern side of the Presidio quadrangle and a portion of the northern side. The wall-foundations were nearly twice as long as the dimensions shown in Comandante Sal's plan and were located farther to the east than expected.

The discovery of remnants of the original Spanish Presidio sparked the imaginations of cultural resources professionals, military and National Park Service personnel, and the residents of San Francisco and stimulated increased public involvement and agency cooperation. "It's an amazing discovery," said Glades Hansen, a retired archivist for the City of San Francisco. Public tours of this exciting find were included in the city's annual birthday celebration which coincides with the founding of the Presidio. A cooperative effort ensued among Los Californianos (descendants of the original Anza expedition), Spanish consulate, Boy Scout Troop 77, California Office of Historic Preservation, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Park Service, and the Army to make information widely available to the public and other agencies.

"This is part of the ultimate irony that in the 217 years that the Presidio has been here, we would find proof of the first occupants now that we are preparing to turn the post over to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area," said Col. Gregory Renn, Garrison Commander. Among those activities intended to publicize the find and to increase public awareness of the Presidio's rich history were development of a traveling exhibit which has been featured at professional conferences and public meetings throughout the United States, production of a one-hour documentary video on the Presidio's history which is shown daily at the National Park Service Presidio visitor center, distribution of fact sheets and interpretive materials to the public, historic preservation training for Army and National Park Service staff, and a variety of events held on the Presidio during National Preservation Week and California Archeology Week.

The Army is proceeding with a comprehensive program of infrastructure improvements and environmental remediation at the Presidio. Concurrently, the National Park Service is undertaking a wide variety of projects in accordance with its general management plan. These undertakings are now being reviewed under a new Programmatic Agreement executed by the National Park Service. Cultural resources specialists from both agencies continue to work together to safeguard the Presidio's irreplaceable cultural

record. Army projects are examined jointly and are subject to review and permitting by National Park Service oversight groups. The number, complexity, and time-sensitive nature of both Army and National Park Service projects require meticulous yet responsive assessment.

An archeological sensitivity model developed by the National Park Service has facilitated the review process, permitting effective use of resources earmarked for the cleanup and remediation effort. This is clearly demonstrated in the development of archeological monitoring protocols which have evolved during the past three years. Additional procedures are currently being developed to deal with such issues as sensitivity assessment, curation, inadvertent discovery, and recordation. Particularly important is the problem of hazardous and toxic waste at the Presidio and the thorny issue of how to deal with areas of contamination as they affect archeological features and artifacts. The questions of how to deal with these health and safety issues and to effectively satisfy cultural resources requirements are still being resolved.

Since the discovery of the Spanish Presidio wall-foundation in 1993, National Park Service archeologists have located collapsed adobe walls near the 1792 chapel and sacristy of the Presidio, and, early in 1996, tile and packed earth flooring were uncovered on the eastern side of the Presidio during placement of a fiber optic cable. Significant discoveries will continue to be made as cleanup and remediation progress. Through the continued cooperation between the National Park Service and the Army, these irreplaceable fragments of American history will continue to be safeguarded for the benefit of future generations.

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